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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - Syria Trade UNESCO - Cultural
Diversity
PARIS - Monday, October 24, 2005

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

1. Syria
2. Trade
3. UNESCO - Cultural Diversity

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

Most front pages and editorials are devoted to the government's decision to partially privatize EDF, the nation's power company. The state is to retain 85 percent of the capital. Editorialists in the specialized and general press are overwhelmingly favorable to the government's decision.

Hurricane Wilma was a major weekend story. Today's popular France Soir predicts on its front page: "The Infernal Cycle of Catastrophes," devotes several pages to "An Angry Planet of Tsunamis, Cyclones and Earthquakes" and to the deteriorating

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situation in Pakistan. France Soir reports on the al-Qaeda videotape calling for Muslims to help Pakistan. In Le Figaro Francois Hauter comments: "Al-Zawahiri's call is hardly innocent: in the tribal zones of Pakistan and Afghanistan, al-Qaeda is being threatened by the Pakistani army which has been taking over the region. Pakistan is al-Qaeda's natural base but it needs to strengthen its position and the earthquake is presenting it with a great opportunity."

Syria in the aftermath of the Mehlis report is one of today's major international stories. One report in Le Figaro analyzes the impact of the report on Israel, while over the weekend Le Figaro featured a story on Syria's exit strategies. (See Part C)

The fallout from France's opposition to Europe over agricultural tariffs elicits an op-ed in Liberation "shaming" France for its position. (See Part C)

Cultural diversity and the convention adopted at UNESCO is "a beautiful victory for France" according to editorialist Jean-Paul Mulot in Le Figaro, (See Part C) which also carries an open letter from a group of international film industry figures titled "We Must Defend Cultural Diversity."

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

Syria

"Two Scenarios For an Exit Strategy"

Georges Malbrunot in right-of-center Le Figaro (10/22): "The involvement of Syrian intelligence in the assassination of Hariri gives el-Assad the perfect opportunity to break away from the intelligence grip which has kept him from his own plans for economic and political reforms. This is the scenario that most Syrians and France would like to see enacted. But the price to pay is high. It implies new alliances in a system that is dominated by the Alawi minority. It means breaking with a tradition of endemic corruption, which benefits the Syrian President's close entourage. The question is whether el-Assad has the means to do battle with his own camp. Whether he has the courage to play his people against his own family. Until now no one thought he might sacrifice one of his own. But today, el Assad's back is against the wall. The second scenario says that he will ignore the conclusions of the Mehlis report and will decide to entrench himself behind his family, while continuing to rule with an iron hand. This is a North Korean-style scenario that implies an even greater regional and international isolation of Syria, with, at the end of the road, possible international sanctions. During the next three months Syria will try to negotiate, using its so-called position to stabilize Iraq, Lebanon and the Middle East, as a negotiating chip. But is there room for negotiations?"

"The Israelis Uncertain About Syria"

Jean-Luc Renaudie in right-of-center Le Figaro (10/24):
"Israel and its leaders are divided over Syria. But in spite of their differences, all experts in Israel believe that the future of Syria is in the hands of President Bush."

Trade

"WTO: Shame on France"

Esther Dufilo in left-of-center Liberation (10/24): "Because the decisions of the WTO must be unanimous, France is in a position to impose its veto on any decision that does not meet its demands and is therefore in a position to make the negotiations in Hong Kong fail. This is indeed where we may be heading. This attitude is outrageous, specifically as far as developing nations are concerned. The Europeans and the Americans are protecting their farmers through subsidies and tariffs. The U.S. is playing it safe when it says that it will not touch its subsidies except as part of a general agreement, which it knows will not happen because of the French. Meanwhile at the UN France's hypocrisy was obvious when it proposed a tax on air travel to help developing nations."

UNESCO - Cultural Diversity

"France's 'Genius' in Question"

Jean-Paul Mulot in right-of-center Le Figaro (10/24):
"UNESCO's convention on cultural diversity is a beautiful victory for France. But this victory would not have been possible without Europe's team spirit. In spite of our quarrels, the Paris-London axis won. America's protest did not influence Blair. For once, the European Union spoke with one voice. Yet, the American administration did all it could to keep the text from being adopted. Secretary Rice took pen and paper to sermon her allies while putting some extra friendly pressure on smaller countries. All was for naught and the State Department simply took note of its isolation and expressed its 'disappointment.' We dearly hope that this will not be an opportunity for Washington to question its contribution to UNESCO - which is close to one fourth of the organization's budget. But as the Bush administration pointed out, the convention can have a perverse effect and allow certain un-democratic regimes to hide behind the convention in order to justify censorship and proselytism. While we share President Chirac's optimism, we also hope that France's 'genius' will be able to impose itself not just because it symbolizes the era of enlightenment, but because it can win without cheating." STAPLETON